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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: MORE PESSIMISM FROM OMANI FM ON UPCOMING ARAB  
LEAGUE SUMMIT, LEBANON, PEACE PROCESS

REF: A. MUSCAT 180

[1](#)B. CAIRO 466 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo per 1.4 (B and D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi reiterated his previous pessimistic forecast (ref A) for next week's Arab League (AL) Summit in Damascus. Prospects for positive development on Lebanon and Israel-Palestine were "very modest," although bin Alawi intimated that a Qatari initiative on Lebanon might attract interest. Meeting with the Ambassador March 19, Bin Alawi also reviewed recent meetings he had had in Damascus with the Syrian, Qatari and Iranian foreign ministers and with Syrian President Bashar al Assad. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On the peace process, bin Alawi had little to say beyond comments made to NEA Assistant Secretary Welch in Cairo on March 6 (ref B). "I've been doing this longer than any of you and I see nothing at the moment that is encouraging," pronounced bin Alawi. Since Annapolis, he said, the Israelis have "walked back," Mahmoud Abbas' standing has been further diminished, the Arab League has shown neither the clout nor the initiative to affect the problem, and Palestinians continue to confront scarcity and hopelessness. While not turning its back on the Annapolis process, Oman is discouraged, said bin Alawi. "We've seen this before."

[1](#)3. (C) On Lebanon, bin Alawi said "no one but Michel Aoun" can break the logjam in Beirut. In his view, Aoun is determined to stall and wait the process out in his unflinching pursuit of the Lebanese presidency. Amal and Hezbollah do not care for the current situation, said bin Alawi, but neither can afford to alienate him. Moreover, the Syrians told bin Alawi they were powerless to affect the situation, although he was not entirely convinced. Bin Alawi voiced some hope in an unspecified Qatari effort to assemble a proposal for consideration in Damascus.

[1](#)4. (C) After the AL fomins conference in Cairo, bin Alawi traveled to Damascus on the invitation of Qatari FM Hamed bin Jassim to meet with him and their Syrian and Iranian counterparts to discuss Lebanon. However, said bin Alawi, they could not agree on a way forward and they left empty-handed. Later, he was invited to call on President Bashar and had an extended discussion with the Syrian on Lebanon. Rather than discuss the immediate problem, bin Alawi said he urged Bashar to take a "longer view" of the relationship that Syria and Lebanon would have to have. He urged Bashar to consider opening an embassy in Beirut and begin discussions on fixing borders. He also reportedly encouraged the Syrian to build strong economic ties with its neighbor, i.e., make economic interests the "custodian of the new relationship." He used the examples of the U.S. and China and of the UAE and Iran as countries that used trade and investment to forge constructive relationships in spite

of significant political differences. He said Bashar appeared to be interested and even acknowledged the validity of the Omani argument.

15. (C) Comment: Relaxed and in apparent good cheer after two weeks on the road, Bin Alawi seemed resigned to the region's problems. He actually apologized for having spoken so bluntly to A/S Welch in Cairo but quickly added Oman's trademark justification, "We believe in speaking honestly with our friends." He gave the distinct impression that Oman will be going through the motions in Damascus next week.  
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